Interview with Marshall Green

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR MARSHALL GREEN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: December 20, 1988

Q: Mr. Ambassador, we are now coming to 1961. Could you describe the situation as you saw it at that time, that led to the coup of 1961?

GREEN: Yes. 1961 was an even more tumultuous year for me and, I might say, for Korea, than 1960. It contains many memories that are both bitter and sweet. On March 10, Ambassador McConaughy received word that he was going to be assigned to Washington as Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, which meant that I would be taking over the job as charg# d'affaires, not knowing who the new ambassador was going to be. When McConaughy left, which was in mid-April, he was leaving in my hands a rather dicey situation.

The Chang Myun government had been in power for about nine months, during which there had been considerable accomplishments. On the other hand, these accomplishments were largely pressed upon them by us and entailed a number of political risks, especially for Prime Minister Chang Myun. For example, he agreed to the institution of a realistic unitary exchange rate. This was not going to be popular. Secondly, he took measures to raise transportation and power rates, cutting out subsidies. Thirdly, he took measures to normalize AID procedures, so that the Republic of Korea took on more of

the responsibilities for funding infrastructure costs of our military and ROK military in Korea than it had previously. Fourthly, Korea was assuming more of the costs of their own defense, yet continuing to observe Status of Force agreements that clearly gave the United States more rights in this situation than are usually present. We were engaged in Status of Force negotiations, which never bore fruit during my years in Korea.

Q: What was our role? You mentioned the various reforms and Status of Force. Were we calling the tune?

GREEN: Yes, we were.

Q: Were there any pressures? How did you operate?

GREEN: Yes, we were exerting a great deal of pressure. The pressure, in the last analysis, derived from congressional restraints, congressional limitations on funds that were available, and therefore we had to accommodate to that situation. In other words, we had to get the Korean Government to do more to help itself, since we couldn't be giving the kinds and levels of aid that we had previously, due to cutbacks in our defense and other budgets. Therefore, if we were going to maintain the level of defense that we had in Korea, Korea had to take on more of the responsibilities. Moreover the won was greatly overvalued, which contributed to the corruption prevalent in Korea under the Chang Myun government.

So the rigors of these changes that we pressed upon the Koreans created tensions in the Korean community, and it made it appear that Chang Myun was running errands for us. He was never a strong or forceful leader, and all we were doing contributed to the impression of his succumbing to U.S. pressures.

Q: This raises an interesting point. Here is a government on which we can exert a lot of pressure. Were you or the embassy or State beginning to get worried? Sometimes there

is such a thing as being overly successful in making your points. Were you looking at the cumulative effect of this?

GREEN: Stu, you've made a very sound point, obviously reflecting your own diplomatic expertise. Of course we were very aware of the dangers present in this type of situation. Furthermore, we knew that nationalism in Korea, which had been delayed by the war and reconstruction, was now becoming an important factor in the Korean makeup. We in the embassy were well aware of the dangers in this total situation. We leaned over backwards to avoid appearances of dictating to the government or of pushing them around. I can remember very well that our meetings with Chang Myun were carried on in private homes, not in offices, that we did everything we could to lower our profile in dealing with the Korean government on these issues, if only to try to minimize the dangers that our pressures on the Korean Government might become too visible.

Q: What about Status of Forces? My impression is that once the American military gets a policy in its bed, mixing a metaphor, it will press for everything it can possibly get, without thinking of the long term consequences. Were you having to rein in our military from trying to get more out of the Koreans?

GREEN: I was very familiar with the political aspects of the problem that you just noted, having served on the NASH mission back in 1957, when, on a worldwide basis, we did what we could to improve community-U.S. force relations and to avoid the kinds of problems that we had been having.

In the case of Korea, the problem was particularly complicated because we had a United Nations command headed by an American general, with all the ROK First Army, which was all Korea's fighting-effective forces, 450,000 in number, under his command. We had two divisions there, plus a corps headquarters and some air units. How that would all fit into a Status of Force Agreement made it particularly complex. As I say, we entered into negotiations, but as I recall, while I was in Korea we never finalized them. The very fact

that we were holding these negotiations obviously came to widespread attention in the military, probably created certain concerns. On the other hand, I can't believe that this was, in itself, a major factor in stirring up the military. One has to bear in mind something which became more apparent after the coup occurred, but I mention it because in retrospect, this seems to be a very important factor. In the Korean military, there were many young officers, field grade officers who had served in key exposed positions in the Korean War. They were serving under senior officers, many of whom had not really been in the fighting, and many of whom were now receiving various kinds of favors. In other words, corruption was rather widespread amongst many of the senior military. Of course, it was widespread in the community in general. But it may not have been as widespread as the lieutenant colonels thought it was. Anyway, within the military there was a great deal of disgruntlement. It wasn't necessarily directed at Chang Myun, but rather at life in general.

When the coup did occur, it was this kind of feeling of resentment and disgruntlement that, in turn, churned up strong feelings for wanting to correct things, a kind of a Puritanism, where they wanted to impose their will upon all the people of Korea. I think that this was a very important force behind the military coup. I mention this now in terms of what was building up before the coup.

Another problem was Prime Minister Chang Myun's shy manner, his quiet personality, and his lack of rapport with the people, Korea was badly in need of leadership. These were things that could not be corrected by anybody. These were simply facts of life we had to live with. I remember Ambassador McConaughy, in his very tactful way—and by the way, he was a superb diplomat—urged the Prime Minister to get out of Seoul, get out amongst the people, identify himself more with the national scene. He also urged him to draw younger leaders into higher positions. He was quite conscious that the youth of the country was disaffected that there was a feeling of estrangement with a government composed of older people out of touch with the problems of their juniors.

Q: Was the government pretty much of one class?

GREEN: That's hard to say. I can't recall exactly its composition, but it would be basically the older guard, people who had had advantages of better education, civilians, who had many contacts abroad. Some of them were good economists. They were people that talked our language. But I'm talking about other people that we didn't know very well, but of whom we were very conscious—or at least increasingly conscious—of their importance and the fact that they had to be brought into the picture.

Basically, as I have said before, it was a very bleak picture in Korea, with a lot of recriminations: recriminations against the United States, against the government, against different groups of people, and it was wide open to exploitation from the communists in the north. We have to remember that here we were in Seoul, which represented maybe 30% of the population of Korea, just 25 miles below the DMZ, above which there were something like 600,000 North Korean forces.

Q: And you were on the wrong side of the Han River, too.

GREEN: We were on the north side of the Han River. So it was not a comfortable situation to be in from any viewpoint, internally or in external terms. In the latter connection, Korea had no major friends in the world, except the United States. It had no relations with its neighbors: Japan, China, the Soviet Union, and North Korea. This is the situation in which United States diplomacy had to operate.

I was just rereading one of my wife's letters to a friend in which she wrote, “The hopelessness of everything here, the confinement, the isolation, the bleakness, almost anything could happen at any moment.” That letter was written in mid-April 1961, just about the time the ambassador was leaving and I was taking over charg# d'affaires. She goes on in another letter to say, on April 26, about how I was working around the clock and how worried I was, and how there were rumblings in the night and constant demonstrations. The students were restive, and there was a sense of tension you could cut with a knife.

That brings us to the coup itself, exactly one month after McConaughy's departure. In the wee hours of the morning of May 16, 1961, I was woken by a phone call from General Magruder, CINCUNK (Commander in Chief, United Nations Forces in Korea), who had the ROK fighting effectives under his command, as well as two American divisions and components of Turkish, Commonwealth, Ethiopian, Thai, and other forces. He called me up in the wee hours of the morning and asked me if I heard any shooting because there was a lot of shooting in the south of Seoul. (He was about four miles away in the south post.) I said, no, I could hear no shooting, “What was it all about?”

He said that a military coup was in progress. The chief of staff of the Army, General Chang Do Yung, had already been in touch with him about a coup that evidently involved several thousand soldiers. He asked General Magruder for support in the form of U.S. forces, as well as ROK forces, to suppress the coup. Magruder had said to me that his answer to Chang Do Yung was that we could not involve U.S. forces, and that he, Magruder, in fact, was going to order, or was ordering all US forces to their barracks.

Q: These are the Americans.

GREEN: The Americans. I told General Magruder that I completely agreed with that latter order, and I went on to say that I thought it would be very important that we, as soon as possible, make it publicly clear that the United States has nothing to do with this coup, and that the United States Government, in fact, supports the duly constituted government of Chang Myun elected in free and fair elections after many years of United States urging. We clearly could not turn our backs on that government in its hour of peril. This was a matter of important principle. Would he go along with me on such a statement? This was around 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, over the phone.He replied that he would have to think that one over, and perhaps we could have breakfast together around 7:00 the next day.

He called me up around 6:00 before we had breakfast, to say that he felt we should go forward with that kind of a statement immediately, his principal reason being that General

Lee Han Lim, who was the commander of the First ROK Army, had been in touch with him just a few minutes previously, to urge that the United States clarify its position, because the coup group was spreading the word through all the commands of General Magruder, that the United States was behind the coup. Unless we made our position crystal clear, we would bear a responsibility through inaction in allowing the coup to consolidate its hold on the country.

General Magruder had great respect for General Lee, and he therefore came over to the embassy, or perhaps we did this over the phone; I can't recall. But he drew up a statement for public release to be accompanied by a statement which I would make. His statement would be made as Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Forces; mine would be made as a charg# d'affaires of the American Embassy. He would be speaking, in other words, in an international capacity; I would be speaking in a national capacity. So Magruder's statement called upon all military personnel and his command to support the duly constituted government headed by Minister Chang Myun. My statement, which paralleled and accompanied his, strongly concurred in the position that was taken by General Magruder, adding that I wished to make it emphatically clear that the United States supports the constitutional government of the Republic of Korea as elected by the people of the republic last July, and as constituted last August with the election of a prime minister.

Both statements were immediately carried every hour on the hour by the United States Armed Forces Radio, located in Seoul.

Q: This would be broadcast in English?

GREEN: Broadcast in English and in Korean.

Q: Because normally these broadcasts were only in English for the troops.

GREEN: But our announcement was carried in only one newspaper; and not carried in any Korean broadcasts, because meanwhile the coup had taken over the communications of the country.

There was, of course, no time to clear these statements with Washington.

Q: We're talking about the role of an embassy, of the military. Over a period of time, there had been rumblings. You knew there was discontent. Did you and General Magruder have essentially a "coup file" which you pulled out, and in consultation with Magruder's superiors and with your superiors back in Washington? What do you do?

GREEN: We could be faulted on those grounds that we didn't have any contingency plans to deal with a coup. I don't think it occurred to us that a coup was likely. By the way, you never hear about a successful coup in advance. Because if you do, it doesn't happen! But I do think, in retrospect, that every country or every embassy and every command would be wise to have a contingency plan. The best way to develop such contingency plans would be to come up with a series of hypothetical situations. What do you then do about them?

I might say that this whole experience made me a very strong believer in politico-military war games. I've been engaged in about five of them, and all of them have been highly instructive. The only trouble with these war games is that nobody pays much attention to them in high places, so that it becomes a little bit of an exercise in futility.

Q: Just to add, war games are not just in case of war, but in case of disasters, terrorist incidents, coups, etc.

GREEN: Precisely. Today we have planning exercises against terrorists conducted by all our embassies. Our embassies all have contingency plans. This experience in Korea would merely fortify the argument that more should be done in politico-military war-gaming.

Q: Let's talk a little about communications. Was there anybody you could actually call to talk to and say, “What do I do?” or, “What should we do?”

GREEN: We didn't have that time. We had to get that announcement out right away if it was to have any effect. It never occurred to me that there would be anything but support in Washington for the position that Magruder and I were taking. Maybe I was naive in that supposition, but, since we had worked so hard for so long to get duly constituted government in power, and since this small coup group, led by God knows who and for what purpose.

Q: Because it was not a matter of absolute anarchy in the streets and all this. Somebody had to come and do something.

GREEN: It was a question of what should the United States do. We had to react. We couldn't just sit there and say, “We have to get Washington's word.” Some people might have thought that would have been the right course, but if we'd done that, then our voice never would have been heard.

Q: Silence would have been acquiescence.

GREEN: Silence would have been acquiescence. I think it would have left the Korean people with a great sense of disillusionment in the United States. As it was, the action that I took that day, as, indeed, the action we had taken the previous year in talking about the justifiable grievances of the students, left the United States with a pretty good record of not siding with those who were wresting power from the people's representatives. This was a record that was that was going to be important, not only in Korea, but in Turkey, Thailand, and many other countries that had experienced coups. We have to bear in mind that what we do, wherever we do it, has a world connotation.

All these thoughts as an experienced diplomat raced through my mind and left me with no choice but to move quickly. In so doing, I obviously kept Washington informed. We told

them immediately what we were doing and, what we had done. We sent in a stream of messages to Washington on an hour-to-hour basis. Our political section was headed by Don Ranard, a very active, conscientious, and able officer, with excellent assistants like Elmer Hulen. They were all first-rate people. We also had a very good cultural attach# and USIS staff. Q: What did you have your staff do?

GREEN: I said to Don Ranard: “Look, I'm going to be busily engaged, as you will see, in a whole series of top level meetings. Your job now is to send out messages to keep Washington as fully informed of events going on as is humanly possible, and in your messages to urge that we get some early reaction to know whether we're on a course they would support.”

My next move, realizing that every minute counted, after issuing this statement and proceeding on the assumption that Washington would endorse a course of action that I now had to take—again, every minute counted—was to call, with General Magruder, on President Yun Po Sun at Blue House, the presidential residence, the one that was tenanted by Rhee for so many years.

We made the call on Yun Po Sun, who seemed glad to receive us. Magruder gave his evaluation of the situation to the extent that he knew about it, which was that the coup group was actively supported by a small group, maybe several thousand, young insurgent dissident officers, but that the Army chief of staff, General Chang Do Yung, remained loyal to the government, a situation which, by the way, was to change in the course of the day. Magruder stressed that many of the insurgent forces were under his (CINCUNC) command, and that their action undermined his authority and imperiled the Republic of Korea by withdrawing forces from the front lines to participate in a political action against the government. He thought it was essential that steps be taken to deal with this coup and to get the forces to return to their positions, the ones under his command. I pointed out that Korea's international standing was very much involved in this issue. We had to support the Republic of Korea every year in United Nations debates. They had a huge

United Nations presence there, aside from just the UNC command. They had all kinds of U.N. machinery that I've talked about before. These events were going to create some real sound waves abroad.

General Magruder then, to my surprise, because he hadn't mentioned this to me before, suddenly asked the president whether he would approve calling upon loyal ROK Army units under General Lee Han Lim, to take up positions surrounding Seoul in overwhelming numbers in comparison to the relatively few coup units in Seoul, so that negotiations with the insurgents could be carried on for a position of government strength.

President Yun was understandably reluctant to take such a bold step, lest it lead to a lot of bloodshed. I alternatively suggested that he call immediately to his office Prime Minister Chang Myun and the leaders of the coup group, to see if there could not be some reconciliation of differences based upon Chang Myun accepting the legitimate demands of the coup group, without wrecking the recently elected government of Korea. In other words, reaching some kind of compromise which, as I said, has occurred on several occasions in Chinese history.

The president wavered. He couldn't bring himself to make the decision. Meanwhile, Magruder left the Blue House, and I lunched alone with President Yun, who was desperately unhappy, at times in tears. He asked me repeatedly whether the position that I had taken reflected instructions from Washington, and I had to say that I had received no word from Washington, since the coup had only occurred nine hours earlier, but that I was certain Washington would support any peaceful means for trying to resolve the crisis in a way that preserved the constitutionally elected government and did so without bloodshed. At least I believe I added the latter.

President Yun remained undecided, so I returned to the embassy.

Q: This is really a remarkable thing that you're saying; here is a government on the verge of toppling, with the president of the government, who holds the ultimate power, spending

a great deal of time sitting and talking with a foreign ambassador. Granted, we had many of the cards, but still, weren't messengers coming in? Weren't other people coming in and saying, 'My God, you 'we got to do this or that"?

GREEN: That's remarkable, when you think of it. I don't recall that there were any interruptions, and I was there for four hours.

Q: The main focus, I would say, at that time would be there, and yet you and he were together.

GREEN: Yun Po Sun, for one thing, was a personal friend. Only two weeks earlier, he and his wife had come to our house for a reception, which was unique in terms of the president going to any foreign establishment. He never did. But Yun Po Sun was a good friend. Incidentally, he was no friend of Chang Myun. Therefore, I was talking to a leader, who was not disposed to want to get together with Chang Myun, who was his political rival.

Q: What was happening to the government apparatus at the time?

GREEN: I had no idea what was happening to the government apparatus! I had no idea. Things were moving so fast, I was focused on the central point of trying to get the government in these very few hours that we had, or they had, to bring about some kind of solution that would retain the constitutional government. That was the focus, and everything I did was focused on that one thing.

Q: That was focus, but what was his focus?

GREEN: Well, that was the focus. His focus was one of being desperately unhappy to see his country caught in this terrible crisis. The United States had this enormous power and influence and so forth, and it was natural that he would turn to us. Everybody did turn to us in times like this.

Q: I don't want to dwell on this point, but was the Korean government apparatus, in a way, not working? Weren't people coming in with information and how this thing was developing and other Cabinet members saying, "My God, we've got to do this or that"?

GREEN: I just don't know, Stu. There were undoubtedly a great deal of things churning around and messages coming in. All I can recall was that the conversation seemed to me to be uninterrupted, that I had the president's full attention, because this was a critical point. We were really talking about what could be done and what could he do. I was focusing on that. If he was going to do anything, he obviously had to have the support and blessing of the United States, because in this situation, he didn't know who really was on his side.

I returned to the embassy, you might say, empty handed. But several hours later, as I recall it was around 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening, I got a call from President Yun, who said that he'd been thinking it over and decided that my counsel was probably the best course to take. He, therefore, had tried to get in touch with Chang Myun, but he couldn't locate him, and did I know where he was. I told the president that I would try to find out, and through our various sources, including CIA—we had a very good station chief—we found out where Chang was. He was hiding in a nunnery that was run by the French. I got a message through to him that it was very important that he get in touch with President Yun Po Sun immediately, that I would hope to hear from him as soon as possible.

I heard nothing that night, but early the next morning, the French ambassador said that he had received a message from Chang in writing, to pass to me. The French obviously didn't want to get involved, but he would pass this message on to me in the south post, where it was arranged that I should meet him, which I did. I picked up a letter addressed to me from Chang Myun.

Q: The prime minister.

GREEN: The prime minister. Before I get into that letter and what it led to, in order to keep the time sequence here, I think perhaps I should return to what we had learned about the coup during the day of May 16. As I said, we had received no message back from Washington during that day.

Q: We're really talking about 3:00 in the morning, so I would have thought that there would be a response.

GREEN: No, there was nothing that came back from Washington. We did receive in the course of the day one or two telephone calls, one from Bob Fearey, who was in our embassy in Tokyo, a good personal friend, to say that he and his colleagues there fully understood and supported us. I got a similar kind of message from Don McDonald in charge of Korean affairs in the State Department, saying that they were working on it, they understood our position very well, and they were doing all they could to be of help. Those were the kinds of messages that I had, but I had nothing official from Washington. Meanwhile, of course, the press ticker was coming in, and we were getting all kinds of play in the international press, some of them supporting what I'd done, some saying I'd goofed. The Chicago Tribune called me a dunderhead, and The New York Times and Washington Post were commending what Magruder and I had done. So there was a mixed kind of reaction, a confused reaction, and the ticker was tapping out editorials and other kinds of press coverage. That was to go on and on for weeks. But my point is that nothing came from our government that was official.

What we had learned in the course of the day was that the real leader behind the coup was Major General Park Chung Hee, who had recently been named deputy commander of the ROK Second Army located in Teego, which is about 150 miles south of Seoul. He was a 44-year-old general, not well known in CINCUNK headquarters, since the Second Army in the southern part of Korea was not under CINCUNK command. Park's inner circle of supporters consisted of colonels and especially lieutenant colonels, of which the most

dominant one seemed to be Lieutenant Colonel Kim Jong Pil, who had married General Park's niece.

The proclaimed leader of the coup, however, as it emerged in the course of the day, was none other than Army Chief of Staff General Chang Do Yung, who initially had asked Magruder to help put down the coup, including the use of U.S. armed forces under CINCUNK command, something I guess you know that Magruder had wisely refused to do. General Chang had evidently, during the next few hours, determined the coup was likely to succeed, and he decided to ride the bandwagon by agreeing to become its titular leader.

The coup group, shortly to be called the Junta, declared that its mission was to rid the nation of a weak and corrupt government, and to stamp out any incipient communist influences, referring largely to the student population and to the Chang Myun government, and to restore law and order.

As I said, we still hadn't received orders from Washington or any response from Washington, but I realized that President Kennedy and Secretary of State Dean Rusk were in Canada. The State Department was under, at that point, Acting Secretary of State Chester Bowles, who obviously knew nothing about the Korean situation. As I suspected, there were some very strong divided opinions as to how to react, particularly since the coup group seemed to be consolidating its hold on power in the face of apathetic reactions on the part of the Korean masses.

To me, in fact, it was very disillusioning to see with what ease this coup group was able to consolidate its position. You would have thought that there would have been a lot of citizens groups, like all these students and professors and others who had brought down Rhee. There was no rush reaction. This, I think, reflected widespread disillusionment with the duly constituted government. One could almost conclude that, Korea wasn't ready for

democracy! It was that kind of gnawing doubt about the Korean people that I found rather upsetting.

Q: Did you have officers out looking at the streets and seeing what was happening?

GREEN: Oh, yes. They were under orders to report everything that went on. We had quite a few people in our various sections. They fanned out and looked and observed, and they interviewed people. Many of them spoke Korean. We knew as much as one could know about the situation. All I'm saying is that there was an apparent feeling of apathy, of people not standing behind the old government, but certainly not supporting the new, of just waiting to see how things turned out, waiting to play the main chance. General Magruder and I and our colleagues had taken a strong stand on behalf of letting these people speak up. If we hadn't, the Korean people would have blamed us for the coup's success. We began the second day of the coup, May 17, with still no word from Washington, although, as I said, we had indications from telephone calls that there was a good deal of sympathy in the State Department for the position that I had taken. But there were also indications that DoD, the Defense Department, was taking a rather different view. They were rather critical of General Magruder, and I think the reason for this criticism was that some of the old-time military who had served in the Korean War and who were very dedicated to the Korean armed forces sort of automatically sided with the military coup group, thinking that they represented the military viewpoint. Of course, they didn't. I mean, Lee Han Lim, for example, was against it, and he was the commander-in-chief of the ROK First Army. Also the ROK Army chief of staff was opposed to it. So were others.

In any case, DoD was reluctant to get involved. They didn't know what to do, whereas the State Department was slow in agreeing with our position.

So this meant that I had to begin the second day of trying to rally the government to take some position through Myun Po Sun and Chang Yun, without real Washington authority to do so. As I said, I was now in touch with Chang Myun, and he sent me this letter which

was dated the morning of May 17. The letter expressed gratitude for my statements supporting his government, but he wanted to know whether the U.S. Government would continue to support that government, and how far we would go if what he called “the rebels” refused to relinquish power. “Would you,” he asked, “either persuade or force the rebels to support the incumbent government or make some compromise with them, or let them take over? The latter course, he said, “Would almost certainly entail court-martialing me and my colleagues, and God knows what would happen to us.” After several further paragraphs pointing to the long-term adverse consequences to the United States of our not opposing the coup, and the loss of CINCUNK's authority and prestige, he talked about how failure to act now would inevitably result in many years of authoritarian military rule, in violation of all that the United States and most Korean people stood for. He said he felt he had to remain in a safe place until these points were clarified.

By the way, he ended the letter by saying, “Destroy after reading,” but I evidently didn't, because I came across this letter in my files the other day. I'd squirreled it away somehow, thinking that perhaps it would have some importance for history. So I still have that letter.

Q: It sounds as though he were reading the American mind. The points he made were well suited.

GREEN: Well suited and well formulated. Remember that he had been ambassador in Washington, and I think he knew our government's thinking very well.

Two hours after receiving this letter, he called me up to ask what my reaction to the letter was. I told him that I had received it, and I felt that he still should establish immediate contact with Yun Po Sun, since the president seemed interested in finding a constitutional solution. In fact, over the previous 12 hours, I'd received seven calls either from Yun Po Sun or his chief assistant with regard to the importance of getting in touch with Chang. Chang replied, expressing concern for his safety and saying that he didn't trust Yun Po Sun. As I said, they had been political rivals, although both standing for the same broad

principles. I ended the phone conversation by noting that I continued to stand firm in support of his government and, in fact, that I'd just been meeting with the International Press at noon on May 17, in which I had reaffirmed my position, despite all the mounting evidence that the Junta was beginning to assert control and hold over the country. Chang remained uncertain, and that was to be, as I recall, my last conversation with him. Returning to the subject of my press conference, the air space over Seoul seemed to be black with planes bringing in the foreign press, especially a lot of Japanese newsmen from Tokyo. Huntington Damon, the USIS chief, had announced that I would meet with them all in the USIS conference room. It was already apparent to these correspondents that the coup was succeeding, that the Korean masses seemed apathetic, as well as apprehensive, and that the U.S. Government in Washington was undecided. In the face of all that, they persisted in asking me, wasn't I going to change my position. I defiantly said, “No! What I said yesterday still stands.”

“Does it reflect the position of your government?” they asked.

I said, “My government has been fully apprised. I am sure they're sorting this all out, and I await word from Washington.” They were dumbfounded that I should take such an independent position without having cleared it all with Washington in advance, and I took pains to point out the whole timing factor of why we had to move when we did. I think, by the way, that most of them clearly understood that and sympathized. At least it was reflected in the articles that they wrote. People like Abe Rosenthal, who rose to great heights in The New York Times, was one of them. He was perhaps the most prescient and wise of the group.

Some hours later, I did receive a press ticker item that State Department spokesman Lincoln White had declared, in response to questions, that “the State Department stood behind the statements made by the American charg# d'affaires.” However, there was no statement by the White House or the Defense Department, and it was already clear to me

that Walter McConauhy, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, was pulling out all stops in Washington to give Magruder and me the backing we needed.

Q: McConaughy had already assumed his job?

GREEN: That's right. Not in terms of trying to reverse the coup, because it was already too late for that, but in reasserting support for the principles long advanced by our government. Incidentally, by so reasserting these principles, we retained some kind of leverage over the new military Junta with regard to the return to civilian rule and making them perhaps more attentive to our viewpoint than they would be if we had just supinely gone along with their position. In other words, I could see that our position was going to gain us some leverage, which was going to be critical, although I won't say that was the reason for my original statement, which was based on principle.

Meanwhile, the Junta was beginning to visit on Korea a harsh r#gime of marshal law, curfews, censorship, (some 800 newspapers had been closed down), arrests, beatings, and campaigns to root out what they called “moral laxity and corruption.” A stream of new austerity and disciplinary regulations were issued. Some of them went to ridiculous lengths. Traffic laws, for example, were being rigorously enforced by gun-toting military in a highly ostentatious manner, in order to “teach everyone a lesson” to obey the law. Jay-walkers, for example, were forced to squat down on the curbside for half an hour to an hour, to teach them a lesson, and do it in a visible way that other people could find “edifying.”

The Junta group was making a great deal of the fact that they were militantly anti-communist, as though that fact in itself would amply justify the coup in the eyes of the Korean people and especially of the United States. It occurred to me, I could say parenthetically, that the United States had, ever since the McCarthy days, made so much of this anti-communism that we really hadn't supplied an adequately affirmative message

as to what we did stand for. It appeared that anti-communism was really what we stood for, rather than being pro-this or pro-that.

Q: This has been an unfortunate theme in our foreign policy, that almost every government that takes power by force, particularly coming at all from the right wing, has used this as its main excuse. And often it's been bought by at least significant elements within American society.

GREEN: Absolutely. In this connection, there were a lot of stories, rumors, going around that Kim Jong Pil, who had married Park's niece, had leftist communist ties in his university days, and that even Park Chung Hee himself was tainted by communist associations.

Q: These were people you really didn't know.

GREEN: These were people we didn't know. As I say, there were rumors about them being this or being that, and I do think that one can say the very stress upon being anti-communist suggested that they might be otherwise. Some people in our embassy felt that way. I can't say that I felt that way. I did think it was a possibility, and I did think we had to be always wary of that being a possibility.

Q: You're talking about the lack of a firm response from Washington, the fact that the prime minister and president of Korea couldn't get their act together. But you're not mentioning the one other thing that anybody who has lived in Seou4 as we both have, [knows]. You looked 20 miles north. Was there concern at this time about the North Koreans making a move because of the obvious disarray?

GREEN: Yes, I think there was a good deal of concern about that, although things were happening so suddenly that I don't think the North Koreans would have been able to put themselves in a position to do anything sudden. We had all the armed forces still up on the DMZ. A North Korean attack would have rallied the country together, you know, which is what North Korea didn't want. What they wanted to do, realistically, was to see

things falling apart, which was happening. So from the North Korean viewpoint, the logical thing might well have been to just let things go the way they are, sliding out of control with increasing internal dissension. Then when the timing was appropriate, when things were ripe, to move in. This is all, of course, conjectural but we were always conscious of the proximity of hostile forces, and undoubtedly Yun Po Sun's reaction to Magruder's surprising suggestion that there be some kind of a military preponderant force brought to bear around Seoul to deal with the coup group, was unacceptable for that very reason. Such a move would possibly invite attacks from the north. I don't know. But in any case, I didn't want to see any organized armed clashes in South Korea, that's for sure.

Q: This was a major factor.

GREEN: I was thinking entirely in terms of a political solution, not a military solution, one of the important reasons being the one you cited now, the proximity of North Korea to the scene.

Late May 17, I received a confidential telegram from Assistant Secretary McConaughy, which said that the State Department agreed with the embassy's assessments and agreed that the coup was contrary to our principles and interests, and supported the position that I had taken. However, the telegram went on to say, the State Department had to adopt a position of “wait and see.” In the absence of some indication that the Chang Myun government was willing to put forth some additional effort to save itself, the Department would refrain from additional public information of U.S. identification with what might be a lost Cabinet.

This was an eminently sensible position. I could appreciate why the State Department had come to that view. I would have, too, now that Chang Myun and President Yun were clearly unable to restore the duly constituted government. The problem now was to get on with the show, and what we were going to do with this new government. The State Department refused to declare a policy toward the coup itself, which I think, again, was

wise, and merely acknowledged that Magruder and I were acting within our rights. So as far as the public was concerned, the State Department simply said we acted within our rights. They still hadn't given us the kind of public support I had sought, but privately they were fully supportive, so I knew that I was operating on the same wave length as the State Department.

One of the problems that I faced at this time was keeping the whole American community together. We had a lot of Americans there, lots of missionaries and businessmen, and we had the world's largest aid establishment, called USOM.

Q: And a lot of military dependents.

GREEN: A lot of military and other dependents and so forth. So it was a big American colony. I wanted to be sure that they were kept apprised of what was going on, why we were doing what we were doing, and answer any questions that they had.

I remember particularly my meetings with USOM and the missionaries. In the case of USOM, the aid mission, they had an auditorium there that seated about 750 people. All the seats were taken and there was a spillover of another several hundred, so I had to speak to the USAM group twice over, each time for about half an hour, in which I explained our position and answered questions. With the missionaries, I remember them all coming. There were about 140 of them that came to the embassy residence and we met in the garden. It was a lovely evening. I stood out there with them and just talked my heart out as to why we had done what we'd done. I had complete support.

The American business community wasn't very big, but it was supportive. I didn't involve myself with our military, because that was Magruder's responsibility, and I'm sure that he met with his people. I was really talking about the civilian community.

Q: I want to emphasize here for the record that an American ambassador, particularly in this period of time—and this is true in other places, too—you had several jobs. One,

you had to work with the government. You had to work with the American military, but then we had such large civilian components abroad that part of your responsibility, and a very important part, is to be concerned about the welfare, which includes, in this case, the safety, but also the information of this large American community. It's something that you can't put to one side and worry about later; you have to keep this group fully apprised.

GREEN: Absolutely. One of the most heartwarming experiences in my whole career was the support and unity of opinion that I experienced in dealing with the American community. It led me to feel that when Americans are faced with a common danger, they really rally together. This may be true of all countries, but it was certainly true in Korea. Korea, as you know, had a long history of bickering amongst the missionaries, and yet that evening with the missionaries, we were all one. So this was one of the compensations of those difficult days.

Meanwhile, on May 18, Lieutenant General Chang Do Young, now entitled Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Committee, which was called SCNR, sent President Kennedy a letter in which he listed the following as being the policies of the revolutionary government: anti-communism, adherence to the U.N. charter, complete elimination of corruption, effectiveness in combating communist tendencies, and transfer of the control of the Korean Government to clean and conscientious civilians upon completion of the revolutionary government's mission.

Shortly thereafter, he announced to the press that he was going to Washington to discuss these things privately with President Kennedy before he left for a summit meeting. We hadn't heard of any such arrangement. Washington had not heard of any such trip, and I knew right away that the White House would be vastly irritated by his unilateral declaration of a meeting with the President.

Q: You had had no communication with this group?

GREEN: So far we had no direct communication with this group. I immediately got on the phone to Walter McConaughy, informed him of this, and said, “Look, I know I'm supposed to try to turn this one off, am I correct?”

He said, “Yes.”

So there was a quick exchange of messages through whatever channel—I can't quite recall—authorizing me to persuade Chang from going to the States, on the grounds that the President's schedule wouldn't permit it.

Thereupon I called on General Chang to deliver this message, and he persisted in thinking it was most important that Kennedy officially recognize the new Korean Government before Kennedy left for the summit meeting. He went on to say that all he asked for was a brief, even 30-minute informal meeting with the President, and that he was preparing a joint communiqu# that he hoped the President and he could sign. I was firmness itself in dealing with him regarding this trip to Washington, but I said that his message to the President was helpful, and that I trusted there would be a response from the White House. This, indeed, was to come some days later when I was authorized to inform Chang, which I did, that the U.S. Government noted with approval the pledges that he'd made about intentions to return the Korean Government to civilian control. There was a question, as I recall, of my trying to get in touch with the real coup leader, General Park Chung Hee in order to establish personal contact and to bring to his attention our views and hear his views. As I recall my meeting with him, which took place the latter part of May, was also an occasion for General Magruder to once again express his strong concerns about restoration of the integrity of his command. By the way, at that time I had about 14 Marine bodyguards, which were regarded as essential for my safety. They followed me in two station wagons wherever I went around Seoul.

Q: This was during or prior the coup time?

GREEN: During the coup time and for maybe two weeks afterwards.

So this whole group of cars swept up to General Park's headquarters, which was in an old dilapidated building. Of course, all my guards stayed out. Magruder and I, accompanied by my military attach#, called on Park. The principal thing I remember about it was the icy atmosphere in which we were greeted. General Park Chung Hee never smiles anyway, and his lips were firmly set in a thin, straight line across his face. He looked very dour. After the most perfunctory of greetings, he set about strongly avowing his long record of being anti-communist, as though I thought otherwise. He pointed out that the military coup was based on fear of the previous government becoming communist-tainted, again to try to develop a feeling on my part of his being against a duly constituted government, on the grounds that it was communist-tainted, which, of course, was ridiculous.

I then pointed out what our reasons were for opposing the coup, and why the United States Government would always stand by a friendly government in time of peril. That remark, by the way, was a very important one, and I'll come back to it later on. The other main purpose of our meeting was to try to get some affirmation about restoration of General Magruder's authority over the elements that had gone to Seoul from their positions on the front lines. Magruder got some kind of assurances from Park on that score, an issue that eventually was worked out. It took a bit of doing on General Magruder's side, and his efforts were not helped by the rumors coming out of DoD, especially on the part of those retired generals like General Van Fleet, who were criticizing Magruder publicly. So it undermined his ability to get things back where they should have been.

You know, you could learn very little from the tightly controlled press and radio in Korea as to how the people really felt about these developments, but our embassy staff knew from its many contacts with the Korean community that feelings of bafflement, insecurity, and disillusionment were rife, and that recriminations abounded against the United States, against the old government, against the new military regime. I wrote a note to myself,

which I later found in my files, saying that the Koreans are basically a very dissatisfied people, with expectations far exceeding possibilities of realization, that they were sort of dreamers and hopers, and therefore very subject to feelings of disillusionment and resentment against all those who they thought stood in their path. We were dealing with a very fundamental psycho-social problem.

Q: I've heard this before, and I tend to think there's some truth to it, of calling the Koreans "the Irish of the Orient." In many ways, it's the same type of race.

GREEN: Koreans are people that I greatly admire for many reasons. In fact, my wife and I have often said that of all the Asians, we think we like the Koreans the most. We never could explain exactly why. I think it is because of their independence of spirit and also because they were going through so many difficulties. One cannot help but sympathize with Koreans for all the dangers and sufferings they've endured.

Q: There's an outgoing and a directness there, too.

GREEN: Yes. We got some very frank statements from many Koreans, even from Chang Do Young, by the way, talking to our cultural attach#, Greg Henderson. There were some amazingly frank statements about how they really felt, which tended to confirm all that I'm saying now and to confirm that there was a great deal of inner doubt with regard to this new government.

This new SCNR was obviously being wracked by internal struggles. It wasn't as though they were all one united group. Later on, General Chang Do Young was to be suddenly ousted from his position as leader. This was preceded by an arrest of all of his entourage, and then suddenly he was ousted with nobody to defend him. There were also very clear indications that the lieutenant colonels, in particular, were a source of strong action-mindedness to crack down on the people, and to visit a kind of austere r#gime on them.

There was a kind of vengefulness in their position against all those that they thought had stood in their way in the past.

Q: Why lieutenant colonels? In 1961, they were in their late thirties?

GREEN: I say lieutenant colonels for this reason. Lieutenant colonel was the highest level in the military that didn't have its hand in the till. The colonels and above were in positions, usually, where they could make some profits out of their positions. Lieutenant colonels could not. They had also spent years to come through field-grade positions where they saw all this and where their resentment deepened. Also lieutenant colonels were the ones, in the case of Korea, who were held up longest in promotions. So that there was this tendency, as I say, for lieutenant colonels to be the politically volatile element. They, of course, were also the most senior of all the people who didn't get political favors, and therefore they were looked up to by soldiers down the line to take the lead. That's why I say lieutenant colonels were and still are very likely to be the incendiary element. Of course, as I said early on, in the case of Korea, they had gone through the Korean War and what had they got from it? Not very much. But what had their elders got for it? A lot.

These younger colonels within the SCNR, I think, were an increasingly difficult problem for Park Chung Hee to control. He was trying to balance one off against the other. I think that if we ever had access to what really went on in this Junta group that we'd find that every day there was a great deal of bickering and a great deal of tension and a great deal of differences, which Park Chung Hee was put in the position of trying to moderate, to try to keep under his control. It wasn't easy.

Meanwhile, on June 21, our new ambassador, Samuel Berger, arrived fresh from his post as Deputy Chief of Mission in Athens. My days as charg# were over.

Q: Had he been nominated before?

GREEN: That's right. We had already known two months earlier that he was coming, and it was not a prospect that I particularly welcomed. The new ambassador had a lot of experience in labor and economic issues, and was good at handling them, but he had no experience in the kind of situation that we faced in Korea, the political strategic position. In fact, he had no experience in Korea at all. He made it clear from the day of his arrival that his views differed from mine. Whereas I was counseling a continuing policy of friendly reserve in our contacts with the SCNR, Ambassador Berger favored going all out to befriend members of the SCNR, to reassure them of our total unqualified support for them. I warned him that kind of outgoing position ran the danger of the government taking the bit in its teeth and, for example, locking back up in jail all those Cabinet ministers that we, at great length, had finally got out of jail. Well, he didn't agree. I might say that the Cabinet members were soon back in jail again.

My views were shared by my staff. Berger, in a way, found himself saddled with an embassy that had a viewpoint that was not in accord with his own. We felt that he was jumping to conclusions very early without absorbing the full measure of what was going on in Korea. We thought he'd be wiser to size up the situation more carefully before adopting a position, but he was very much of a matter-of-fact, get-down-to-business type of person, and he did not like to sit back and think about things like that. He knew damn well what to do.

Q: Do you think also this came from his background? He had made a name for himself early on as being the Labor man who was the entr#e to the socialist government in Britain when we really didn't know anybody when Labor first came in, and he had been dealing with essentially friendly governments in Greece and in Europe? It's also an American tendency that the best way to get what you want is to co-op. If you're wide open and friendly and supportive, you'll get what you want, which doesn't work in many societies. Do you think there's something behind that?

GREEN: Oh, yes, I think there's a lot of truth in that. What you said about his experience in England is a very important one, and he had similar experiences in New Zealand as labor attach# there. Frankly, I liked some things about Berger very much. I liked his directness. He did not ignore me; he did consult me. He would draft telegrams and then pass them to me for my comments. My comments were so numerous, my suggested changes so numerous, that most ambassadors would cease turning to a deputy of that type, but he didn't. He was quite prepared to sit down and argue. So to that extent, I liked him. He also gave me a free hand to continue on, but he obviously wanted a deputy of his own choosing, someone whose views were consistent with his own, and preferably one who was new to the scene and therefore did not carry as much intellectual luggage as I carried, and who would be more malleable in terms of his own views. As a matter of fact, he was pretty blunt about this.

One time he said that he attached a great deal of importance to the fact that he was specifically asked by General Park Chung Hee and Chang Do Young that I not accompany the ambassador on his initial calls on those two generals. He interpreted this to mean that these generals did not wish to treat with me. He then went on to say he hoped I wouldn't leave too soon, for he needed my counsel during this transition period, but he wanted me to know that if I wished to be looking for a new job, he would not stand in my way.

I accordingly wrote to Walter McConaughy, who set the wheels in motion, and after many, many months of waiting and uncertainty and unhappiness on my part, and many frustrations, particularly on the part of my wife, who found it difficult sometimes to deal with Mrs. Berger, that after many months, suddenly I was assigned as consul general to Hong Kong, which was probably the most sought-after position in the Foreign Service for someone of my rank, certainly in our part of the world. I'm forever indebted to Walter for all he did to give me support in those difficult times and to land me with such a fine job after Korea. As a matter of fact, that assignment was important in itself in telling the Koreans

that the U.S. Government, far from putting me in Coventry after my actions, was honoring me with an even more important assignment.

Q: Just to get a little bit of the timing, Mr. Ambassador, how long did you work with Sam Berger until you left?

GREEN: I worked with him from June 21 until my departure from Korea on November 23. I worked with him five months. However, in the course of those five months, I was charg# d'affaires for about two weeks at one time while he went to the Chiefs of Mission meeting, and I went back to Washington on consultation before I was to go to Hong Kong.

Q: Berger was not assigned to Korea because the coup had happened and he was there. This was just a routine assignment for him, in a way.

GREEN: Yes. It was a routine assignment. As a matter of fact, I was left as charg# d'affaires en pied for two months, from mid-April to June.

Q: I would like to talk about the staff there during this whole period that we're talking about. How well were you served by the CIA? Again, this is an unclassified interview.

GREEN: I think I was pretty well served by the CIA after the coup, but not in terms of their ability to foresee the coup. I'm not sure anybody could have done that. That's the kind of thing that's carried on in a way that nobody's ever going to find out about it, if the coup is to succeed. After the coup I did get daily briefings from the CIA, including some fascinating interviews which came to our attention through various ways, of what the coup leaders were saying about me, which, I might say, were very alarming at times. I was a marked man at one point. That's one of the reasons why I had all those bodyguards.

Q: The bodyguards were not against communist infiltrators. (Laughs)

GREEN: No.

Q: We are talking about a time when you had some lieutenant colonels, direct-action types, to deal with.

GREEN: That's right. The ROK CIA, meanwhile, had been established under Kim Jong Pil, and we began to have contacts with them. That proved helpful because when our intelligence people worked with other intelligence people, some useful results occur. It certainly beats their being at war with each other. So there were growing ties between our CIA and their CIA, even though I didn't trust Kim Jong Pil further than you could throw an anvil.

There was one very important event that occurred during those last few months I was in Korea, in which I was the principal actor. One of my closest friends in Korea, Kenny Tchah, who had been a fellow member of the economic club, (we met every month to discuss the economic scene in Korea), came to my house. In fact, he'd come there several times before to talk about the importance that a number of key generals set to a rapprochement between me and General Park. This time he came with the news that General Park did want to contact me, and Park proposed that an informal confidential meeting be held, during the course of which Park would explain the position he had taken, and of certain moves that he proposed to take in the near future.

I asked Tchah Ken Hee, whom I called Kenny, if Park would prefer to have the meeting with the ambassador or with the ambassador and me together.

Q: Ambassador Berger was already on board, so seeing the number-two man in the embassy was highly unusual.

GREEN: Very unusual. Tchah replied that Park definitely wanted to have this meeting with me alone, and not even inform the ambassador. I replied that I had to inform the ambassador and to have his approval, which I was fairly sure he would give.

I then asked Tchah if Park had, in fact, indicated at any time that I should leave Korea the way the ambassador had suggested to me. Tchah replied that some of Park's associates so recommended and had tried to convey threats to me so that I would leave, but that situation had recently been completed changed.

Ambassador Berger subsequently gave his consent, and on the night of July 12, I and my interpreter were picked up by an unmarked jeep with blinds drawn, and taken to a back-alley restaurant in Seoul. There I was led to a private room, where I met for four hours with Park Chung Hee and his close friend, the mayor of Seoul, Brigadier General Yun Taeil, and a Colonel Cho, serving as their interpreter. My interpreter was Kenneth Campen.

Throughout the evening, Park's manner was friendly, almost affable at times, for example, when he asked me whether he thought I could be his friend, even though he didn't play golf. That kind of joking which was very unusual for him. He was also forthcoming and direct.

General Park gave a very frank account of the background of the coup and how Chang Do Young had deceived both Park and Magruder, and under the circumstances, he said he fully understood why General Magruder had acted the way he had. In fact, Park added, had he been in Magruder's shoes, he would have done exactly the same thing. He also wanted me to know that my outspoken support for the duly constituted government was correct and proper and in the best long-term interest of Korea. This is an important point that I will come back to again.

I replied that my concern was not on past events, but on the future and, indeed, on the real success of General Park's government. “This is now in our common interest. Let's put the past aside and consider the future.” The question really comes down to how his government can develop good support and understanding at home and abroad. Yet over the past eight days there had been a rapid succession of moves, including many arrests and accusations, together with reports of punitive measures being taken by the Secret

Police all over the country. “Things like that,” I said, “contribute to apprehensions and misunderstandings both at home and abroad,” and I thought that kind of thing helped explain the continuing business stagnation, the lack of foreign investment, and the economic decline, that Korea couldn't have any degree of economic upsurge until these things were straightened out. Park then gave his indication of his government's intentions to deal with that situation. He said there would be speedy trials and fair trials for all those accused, that many hundreds detained on political charges would be released on July 17. When I asked him about General Lee and Chang Myun being released, he gave reasons for no immediate release, but indicated that as soon as the young colonels cooled down, that would be done. This was a clear indication of the problems he faced within the SCNR. He said that orders were being issued to the Army to treat the populous kindly. As to the return to civilian government, yes, that was desirable, but could not be done until age-old social evils and corruption and communist infiltration were corrected, but the government would, nevertheless, soon announce a specific date for return of government to civilian hands. Meanwhile, a new cabinet would be announced, half of whose members would be civilians. All military officers would in the course of the next year or so be removed from civil service positions and replaced by honest, competent civilians. Park also asked me if the United States could provide him with an economic advisor, an American, who would be in his outer office, at his beck and call, and supply him with the best in the way of counsel on issues related to the development of the economy. I was prepared for that through Kenny Tchah having forewarned me, and I came up with a name—I've forgotten the name right now—of an excellent officer, and Park agreed to it right away. This was a very important development.

In response to further questions, Park allowed that the power struggle within the SCNR was still unresolved, although he said it was mainly over.

After discussing a number of specific economic and aid issues — I've forgotten exactly what they all were — I took the opportunity to raise with General Park something that had been on my mind ever since I was named to Korea, and that was Korea's relationship with

Japan, that if there was to be any real economic recovery, a constructive relationship with Japan was going to be essential, for Japan's economic upsurge could promote a similar upsurge by Korea. Korea could cash in, in other words, on what Japan was doing. Now that Korea didn't have a civilian government with a parliament or a National Assembly, which had been terribly anti-Japanese and where it was politically expedient to be anti-Japanese, Park was really in a position to be moving behind the scenes to improve Korea's relationship with Japan. Park was nodding his head, but he was not committal on that point. I do think I got through to him, though.

I remember leaving that meeting with the impression I had been talking with a man who was deeply motivated. He said at least twice in our conversation that he had staked his life on accomplishing the revolution, and he gave every evidence of really meaning it. Park's most revealing remark of that memorable evening, in which many bottles of sake were consumed, causing Park to be periodically leaving the room to go you know where, was when we parted. He turned to me, as he shook hands to say goodbye, and said, “Mr. Green, before leaving, I want you to know that you have done me a great favor.” I was very surprised. I said, “What favor?”

He said, “You made it so difficult for me to pull a coup d'etat in this country, that I don't think anybody will ever try it here again. And that's the way I want it to be. You have made it more impossible.” Of course, I had never really thought of it in those terms, but from his viewpoint, this clearly indicated why he had confidence in me. That's because I had opposed him or anybody who might now suddenly seize power from him.

Q: Once in power, he saw it from quite a different perspective.

GREEN: That's right. Once he was in power, he saw it from an entirely different perspective! That's why, basically, he wanted to have that long meeting with me. I'm confirmed in that view because over the next several weeks, he invited me accompany him to keising houses.

Q: Keising being the equivalent to a geisha house.

GREEN: That's right.

Q: For dinner.

GREEN: For dinner and watching dances and things like that. It was really rather baffling as to why he asked me out, because he spoke no English and I spoke no Korean. I don't even recall we had an interpreter, or if we did, he wasn't used very much. Park just wanted to sit down there in my company and watch the dances and drink sake and be friends. It was a strange kind of chemical process one cannot explain. After I left Korea, he went me a personal message every Christmas. Several times he invited me to re-visit Korea, including en route as ambassador to Australia in 1973. That was the last time I ever saw President Park.

Q: One of the elements that seems to come through is a respect for integrity, that had we taken a passive role or acquiesced, I think this may apply, if one looks at what happened in Vietnam two years later. When you get involved with a coup and you foster a coup, you're unleashing all sorts of forces, but the overthrow of a legitimate government constitutes a disregard of integrity, of supporting that government, that hurts all parties.

GREEN: Yes, I couldn't agree with you more. You said it very well. That was one of the reasons why I was so appalled by the reactions of many Americans, both in Washington and in the press, about “Green backing the wrong horse,” as though our role in international affairs should be playing the main chance, a policy of expediency, rather than a policy of principle. I think that, as I said earlier on, our principles had been too much confined to anti-communism and not enough in affirmative terms of human rights and human responsibilities. The two go closely hand in hand. And in terms of supporting governments that reflect the will of the people.

Q: I had an interview more than a year ago with Robert Woodward, who expressed concern about our growing reliance on the CIA, undercover world and all this. He felt that we had dissipated one of our great advantages in the world; again I come back to integrity. By looking, as you said, for the main chance. I think this is an example of where integrity pays off and I think it does pay off in the long run.

GREEN: That's right. What our country stands for, not just what it stands against, our willingness to stand by friends in their hour of peril, our reaffirmation of our commitments to other countries, these are the stuff on which good relationships with other countries are based, and if you debase those in any one country, it spreads and weakens your position everywhere.

Just one final note about my stay in Korea. First of all, Park's promises that he made to me that memorable evening weren't all fulfilled. He continued to have difficulties with the SCNR, and it was a long time before many of these things really happened. They did eventually materialize, although during his 17 years as President he never did return the government to civilian rule, although he civilianized the government. I do think he gave Korea a good government. Some will dispute that, but on balance, I think he certainly gave Korea enough stability that it was able, during the next 20 years, to score the most remarkable economic progress and growth rates of any country in the world at any time in history. So in that sense of the word, he succeeded.

Just one last point about my departure. I left Korea with many regrets, with many feelings of deep attachment. When you've been through that much together, your attachment to your colleagues and friends that you were leaving— people like Don Ranard, General Magruder, Ray Moyer, and others, was a warm professional relationship, that you hated to see ended. But I was really glad to get on to a new job. I felt that my mission was over, that the new ambassador was prepared to follow a different line which may or may not have been the wisest thing. I wasn't able to follow Korean events very closely after that, although I was to revisit Korea many times when I was Assistant Secretary and in

other capacities, and most recently on population issues. I had long been concerned that population growth and maldistribution constituted most fundamental long-range problems.

In my meeting in 1982 with the Korean prime minister, he said to me, in response to my question of what he thought were the two greatest dangers Korea faced, he said, after a moment's reflection, “A world business recession that lasted more than two years, and the fact that 40% of the population of Korea lives in or around the city of Seoul, which is only 25 miles south of the DMZ.” Korea had come a long way. Early on, that question was always answered in terms of the communist threat. Now it was expressed in terms of international economic issues, and in terms of demographic pressures. Korea had come a long way.

To get back to my narrative, my wife and I and our ten-year-old son Brampton, left Korea for Hong Kong on Thanksgiving Day 1961. The fact that we were flying to Hong Kong on Korea Airlines, at that time a pretty shoddy outfit with a low international reputation, drew very favorable front-page notice in all the Korean papers, that my family should risk their lives on a Korean plane, as it were! (Laughs)

The Kimpo Airport was thronged with reporters to interview me on my last day, and I told them a bit about my views on all the difficult, challenging times that I endured, and yet my continuing respect, indeed, affection, for the Korean people. But I said it had been a very aging process. I had arrived in Korea in early 1960, 20 years younger than the President of the United States, and here I was leaving almost two years later, one year older than the President of the United States. I said, “That's how much I've aged.” (Laughs)

Q: You mentioned Don Ranard. I recall him when I was serving in Seoul in the late seventies, really, you might say, the twilight years of the Park Chung Hee r#gime. By that time, he had left the Foreign Service and was very much involved as the activist expert on Korea, opposed to the r#gime within circles, particularly in the United States, often missionary circles, but others who felt that the Park r#gime was very harsh. Could you talk

a little about his development while you were there and you saw him? It was typical of a certain type of officer.

GREEN: Yes. Don Ranard had an emotional attachment to democratic government and democratic process in Korea. He was and is highly principled. He was not the kind of person that was prepared to forgive and forget. His position as head of the political section made him all the more committed to preserving democracy and civil rights. My position as charg# d'affaires and later on as Assistant Secretary of State in charge of that area did not permit me to indulge my own equally sharp emotional feelings about the situation in Korea. I also had this personal contact with Park Chung Hee at the end, and as you can see, it frankly left me with a certain feeling of personal friendship for the man, despite what he had done to democracy in Korea. This doesn't mean that I rationalized that the coup d'etat was a good thing, because God knows Korea was to go through all kinds of turmoil—still is—in trying to return to civilian rule. But I did learn a lot from that two years in Korea about human nature and how governments operate, including our own.

I often thought to myself of those words of Oliver Wendell Holmes', “Once to every man and nation comes a moment to decide/Then it is the brave man choose while the coward stands aside.” That line kept reverberating through my mind all during those difficult May days in 1961. It was an emotional experience to be placed in the position that I was. It was easy to see things in terms of those who are for us and those who are against us. I fought against that, because I realized that if there was ever going to be any solution in Korea, there was going to have to be a meeting of the minds. There was going to have to be a reconciliation, without compromising the principles Don Ranard and many of us in the Embassy sought to uphold.

I was also mindful of something that you raised earlier on that has been a dominant consideration in my mind ever since I joined the ranks of diplomacy. You spoke of how far the United States should go in telling other countries what to do. To what extent does this affront nationalism, the strongest force in any country? How do we deal with a

country like Korea, where we had such enormous responsibility and, in those days, were footing the bill, we had commitments of forces and had to defend Korea before the United Nations? How do we go about dealing with the government of a country like that, where our international interests are deeply involved and yet where Korean leaders won't act unless you press them pretty hard? And to the extent Korean leaders accept your urging, they may weaken themselves in the eyes of their own people. In the long run, you may be bringing them down, rather than strengthening their hand.

This is a dilemma. I tried to square that circle many ways. I mentioned earlier how we had pressured Chang Myun. We were aware of this danger, but evidently partly our persistence in pressing on him unpopular measures and partly his own lack of stature and gumption and strength—all this contributed to his downfall, as did the growing discontent. Korea had that combination of poverty and lots of university graduates which can be a very dangerous brew. Dissatisfied intellectuals tend to be revolutionaries, whereas impoverished masses in ghettos don't in themselves pose a challenge to authority. The greatest challenge is from youth who cannot find jobs commensurate with their skills and who are aware of all the fat cats and corrupt elements in their society. Many of them are idealists. They are going to take to the streets, and they're going to find a lot of people who will follow them.

In the case of the military, there was a large group of disgruntled officers. Some 3000 of them, in the last analysis, were the coup itself. Park Chung Hee was using their discontent to bring about his new order in Korea along the lines that he mentioned to me in our conversation. He then faced problems in meeting the demands of those who supported him.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, this has been a fascinating conversation. We will have another one later on about population control. I thank you.

GREEN: Thank you.

End of interview